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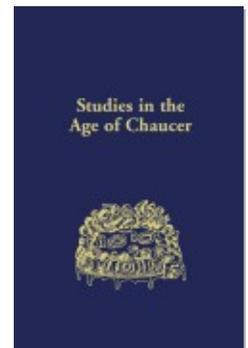
The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women by Diane Bornstein (review)

John F. Plummer

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Constable on renewal and reform in religious life nor Jean Leclercq on theology or R. W. Southern on the schools of Paris and of Chartres. Even apparently unrelated studies, like John Mundy's on urban society and culture in Toulouse, Stephen Kuttner's on jurisprudence, Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny's on translation, or Peter Classen's on universal history, provide unexpected usefulness. Also of interest are Stephen Gersh's essay on metaphysics, Herbert Block's on antiquity, and Nikolaus Haring's on hermeneutics.

This volume will draw students to the study of the twelfth century, make them sensitive to what is new and what is traditional in the period, and encourage them to seek out connections between and among disciplines. It will hardly be less useful to experts, for the range and general density is such that few readers can fail to be instructed — and delighted. Perhaps something of Haskins has been lost: a view of cultural unity few of us would dare adopt today, at least in a book intended for our colleagues. But *Renaissance* is the work of modern giants, widely read, sensitive to shifts in opinion, and perceptive to a fault. Its great accomplishment is that it enables us all to see further.

JOHN C. HIRSH
Georgetown University

DIANE BORNSTEIN, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1983. Pp. 149. \$15.00.

Popular images of medieval women, as Diane Bornstein tells us on the opening page of her book, owe more to the romance than to reality, but might at least in part be corrected through an examination of medieval courtesy literature written for women. She defines this literature as "didactic literature meant to serve as a guide for secular life, . . . not only books of etiquette, but also books of advice from mother or father to daughter, books of instruction addressed to women by clerks, mirrors for the princess, and even *Arts of Love*

containing practical advice that was meant to be taken seriously" (p. 11). "Courtesy books," she writes, "were meant to serve as a guide for behavior in the real world" (p. 13). Her authors run from Tertullian in the second century to Anne de Beaujeu in the sixteenth.

There are a number of problems with these initial formulations. One wonders at the usefulness of "courtesy books" as a term if it can stretch over fourteen centuries and at the apparent circularity of "practical advice that was meant to be taken seriously" (and do we assume that it was meant to be taken seriously because it looks practical, or vice versa?). But careful amplification and elaboration of these opening arguments, coupled with thoughtful distinctions as they became necessary, might have allowed this book's contribution to be significant. Unfortunately, *The Lady in the Tower* is not well argued.

The problems are largely logical or methodological, ranging from false dichotomies through false parallels to circular argument. An example of the first is the opposition romance-reality. The problem is not that romance and reality (or "the real world") is a false opposition in itself but that Bornstein seems to assume that if, for example, a twelfth- and a twentieth-century citizen would agree that Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* is fiction they would likewise agree on the nature of "the real world." The fact is that the medieval romance, the Middle English *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, Ambrose's *De institutione virginis*, and Saint Louis's *Enseignements à sa fille* are all decisively normative. If these latter deal with the "real" world, it is a medieval one, suffused by values specific to the century. It is simply not meaningful to set up Chrétien and the troubadours on one side of an opposed pair and Ambrose and Saint Louis on the other, especially if one adds Jaques d'Amiens to the "nonfiction" pole. The mirror image of this kind of rushed sorting of medieval writers into sheep and goats is this zeugma from page 12: "Different groups of men did not always agree about what roles and activities were proper for women. The Church Fathers thought they should pray and be chaste. The troubadours thought they should cultivate their beauty, read poetry, and flirt." It is hard to understand how someone writing in the

1980s could persist in the unexamined belief that troubadour poetry represents a body of thought, logically parallel to (if different qualitatively from) the body of thought represented by the writings of the fathers, especially given the troubadour scholarship of the past twenty years. Chapter 3, "Woman as Coquette," demonstrates that Bornstein does.

These logical problems take their toll in the body of the book: having begun with the assumption that the courtesy books interest themselves with a world the twentieth-century reader would recognize as "real," Bornstein seems irritated by the normative approach of Francesco Barberino's *Del Reggimento e costumi di donna* toward working women. Summarizing his admonitions that hairdressers not flirt with their clients, bakers not use false measure, fruiterers not put fresh leaves on old fruit, and that millers not return bad flour for good grain, Bornstein concludes "rather than taking interest in their actual work. . . he assumes the point of view of a customer who does not want to be cheated" (pp. 104–105). Only the initial assumption that Barberino was the equivalent of a late-twentieth-century sociologist could lead one to be surprised by his attitude. That Bornstein would be more concerned with the women's feelings, difficulties, and successes is entirely fitting and, of course, several centuries overdue. But her impatience with the authors she studies for not sharing her interests and attitudes is obstructive and short-circuits analysis.

The Lady in the Tower is often more concerned with the motivations of authors than with their texts, and the result is almost always logical problems. We are told, for example, that *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* "is written entirely from a man's point of view," an observation that carries odd implications of alternatives. We are told that Geoffrey de la Tour Landry's emphasis on religious activities "comes not from his own faith, but from his desire to keep women secluded and to make them the custodians of morality" (p. 49). But is it not quite likely that Geoffrey's faith *implied* keeping women secluded as custodians of morality? The material that Bornstein has herself assembled suggests exactly that. Here as so often elsewhere Bornstein claims to understand the motivation of her authors but offers no evidence to substantiate her claims. Geof-

frey's "approval of fasting [for women] is tied to his frugality," we are told, and the weight he attaches to lost opportunities to marry shows that he "was obviously worried about having to marry off three daughters" (p. 50). One wishes that Bornstein had decided early on whether she was going to analyze the courtesy books as artifacts of cultural attitudes or as evidences of this or that writer's personality, or that the distinction would at least be maintained. Chaucerians especially would stand to gain greatly by a better understanding of "standard" late-medieval attitudes toward women, the better to assess Chaucer's (often presumed) differences from the standard. To be told that Geoffrey de la Tour Landry had a "man's attitude" toward women does not, however, add much to our store of knowledge. Another example of logical muddle arising from attempts to divine authors' motivations is found in the remarks on Anne of France and Christine de Pizan: "Anne used Christine's *Livre des trois vertus* as a source. There were two copies of it in her library as well as a copy of the *Cité des dames*. This alone, however, probably does not account for the similarities in their works. Christine and Anne were kindred spirits." The evidence of this kindredness of spirit is presumably (none is offered) to be found in the similarities of the two books, or—equally circular—perhaps in the fact that Anne had two copies of Christine's *Livre des trois vertus* in her library.

The Lady in the Tower lacks a thesis, fails to convince that the fourteen-century span of books it covers forms a coherent genre, and is marked by repetitions, self-contradictions (Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* is said on p. 44 to be "a comic treatment of a courtly love relationship" and on p. 46 to have "celebrated courtly love"), entirely too much summarizing, too little analysis, and surprisingly poor writing. Given the extensiveness of Bornstein's knowledge on the subject of courtesy books and medieval women, this volume is a particular disappointment.

JOHN F. PLUMMER
Vanderbilt University